



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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**DECEMBER 6, 2002
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

ASSISTANT U.S. ATTORNEY HONORED AS 'OUTSTANDING PROSECUTOR'

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert recently received national recognition for his work in Operation Cocaine Cowboys, which resulted in the successful prosecution of 31 defendants charged with illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales in Jasper County and elsewhere in Southwest Missouri.

Eggert, Assistant U.S. Attorney in the district's Springfield office, received the Midwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Program's Outstanding Prosecutor for 2002 Award. Midwest HIDTA officials selected Eggert for the honor because of his success with Operation Cocaine Cowboys and several other prosecutions. Eggert was selected from a pool of his peers in Missouri, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Operation Cocaine Cowboys focused on an organization of individuals who were allegedly responsible for the delivery and distribution of multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana and other drugs from sources in California, Texas and Guatemala. As charged in a series of federal indictments and federal criminal complaints, Graves explained, 36 federal defendants allegedly distributed illegal narcotics, primarily in Jasper County, but also in at least four other southwest Missouri counties (Christian, Greene, Lawrence and Webster) and elsewhere. Graves said that undercover officers made numerous purchases of illegal drugs and weapons as part of the investigation. In addition to the federal defendants, about 26 other individuals, including adults and juveniles, face a variety of state charges in related cases, primarily in Jasper County.

Of the 36 federal defendants, 31 have been convicted and three remain fugitives. Charges against two defendants were dismissed in favor of state prosecution.

Most recently, a federal jury convicted three defendants for their role in a conspiracy to distribute cocaine and methamphetamine. Samuel M. Burton, 37, of Carthage, Missouri; Juan

Reyes, 32, of Stotts City, Missouri; and Marisela Gonzalez Huerta, 34, of Anderson, Missouri; were convicted of all federal charges related to a conspiracy to distribute cocaine. Burton was charged in six counts contained in a 52-count superceding indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Springfield earlier this year. Reyes was charged in three counts of that indictment. Huerta was charged in one count of that indictment. In addition to those charges, each of the defendants was also convicted of a criminal forfeiture count of that indictment, which requires them to forfeit to the United States \$32,255.

Following the trial of Burton, Reyes and Huerta, a U.S. District Court jury in Springfield deliberated about eight hours before returning the guilty verdicts to U.S. District Judge Richard E. Dorr on November 13, 2002, ending a trial that began November 5, 2002.

Eggert has been working in his current capacity as Assistant U.S. Attorney for five years. Since joining the United States Attorney's Office, he has prosecuted almost 100 cases.

Previously, Eggert worked as assistant prosecuting attorney in Platte County, Mo. He received his law degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia, an undergraduate degree in theology from Baptist Bible College and a master's degree in American history from Southwest Missouri State University. He is a native of Grandview, Mo. Eggert currently is a member of Park Crest Baptist Church, vice president of the Kiwanis Club, a chairperson for the Green County Historical Sites Board, a faculty member at Drury University and author of the Criminal Appeals Chapter of the Missouri Bar Association's Criminal Law Desk Book.

David Barton, Midwest HIDTA Executive Director, presented the award to Eggert. A second award also was presented to Mandy Pardoe, a crime information analyst with the Missouri State Highway Patrol in Jefferson City. Pardoe received HIDTA's Outstanding Intelligence Analyst Award for 2002. She has been working with the patrol more than three years.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow